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ABSTRACT

This study, based on a survey of 302 cooperating teachers, investigated what cooperating teachers learn about themselves when working with student teachers, the impact of serving as a cooperating teacher on one's personal career path, satisfying or problematic features of the role of cooperating teacher, and contributions that cooperating teachers make to their profession. Cooperating teachers recognized their importance and influence over student teachers. They saw themselves as adequately prepared to serve as cooperating teachers, found serving as a cooperating teacher to be personally satisfying, and felt it to be a positive professional development experience. They were a little less inclined to view teacher education students as being prepared to benefit from their experience and they were less inclined to report adequate support by university supervisors in their work. Cooperating teachers viewed their role as mainly one of directing student teachers and facilitating growth. More cooperating teachers looked forward to receiving ideas and information from the student teachers than to giving ideas and information. Some cooperating teachers expressed uncertainty about their role and, to a lesser extent, the role of the university. The survey form is appended. (Contains 40 references.) (JDD)

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Exploring the Role of Cooperating Teacher in Relationship to Personal Career Development

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The Place of Student Teaching in Teacher Preparation

Student teaching has been a central feature of teacher preparation for most of the twentieth century (Griffin, 1986; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Despite differences in terminology (e.g., "practice teaching," "student teaching," "internship"), the perceived value of providing teacher education students with an extended period of time working in a classroom under the guidance of a veteran teacher is evident. For example, Watts (1987) reports that practicing teachers identify student teaching as "the most valuable and helpful component of their total preparation program" (p. 151) and that student teaching is required for certification in all 50 states. In addition, the student teaching triad--student, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor--continues as the standard configuration for student teaching, although there is evidence of redefining the roles and responsibilities of members of the triad, especially the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor (Cornbleth & Ellsworth, 1994; Gore, 1991; Kagan, Dennis, Igou, Moore, & Sparks, 1993; Page, Page, Warkentin, & Dickinson, 1994; Zeichner, 1992).

Because of its high visibility, the student teaching experience is also scrutinized. Its critics suggest that student teaching arose out of convenience and unexamined traditions (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Ishler, Winecoff, Edens, Wieland, & Toner, n.d.). Black (1993) argues that student teaching is often

seen as a "necessary inconvenience" (p. 146) and Guyton and McIntyre (1990) report that "many critics have charged that student teaching has failed to evolve much beyond the medieval apprenticeship training model, has not developed a sound theoretical basis, and has no uniform or standard structure" (p. 514). Cornbleth and Ellsworth (1994) propose that "contemporary options for student teaching" are limited by "a residue of past practices and external regulations" (p. 50) found in teacher education programs and state departments of education. Other elements of the student teaching practicum that are criticized include the poorly defined purposes for student teaching (Watts, 1987) and its weak relationship to the rest of teacher education programs (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990), the atheoretical (Lanier & Little, 1986; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990) and overly experiential basis of student teaching (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987), the negative socializing pressures of field sites (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990), the poor procedures for selecting cooperating teachers and university supervisors, and the weak or nonexistent training provided them (Glickman & Bey, 1990; Griffin, 1986; Metcalf, 1991; Zeichner, 1992).

Regardless of specific details, the student teaching experience typically depends on relationships in the student teaching triad. Just as the purposes of student teaching are often unclear, so too are the roles and responsibilities of the student teaching triad members. Guyton and McIntyre (1990)

suggest that written statements provided by schools, colleges, and departments of education are somewhat general in enumerating roles of responsibilities of triad members, "especially regarding the cooperating teacher, over whom the SCDE has no authority" (p. 522). In turn, this vagueness fosters a free interpretation of what student teaching is all about. Boydell (1991) also observes that "the three triad members may be virtual strangers who differ in backgrounds, perspectives, and expectations, and these differences can lead to conflict" (p. 138). According to Griffin (1986), variations in the roles and activities of cooperating teachers and university supervisors may reflect differences in the universities, school districts, or schools in which they work. Griffin (1986) further reports that groups of cooperating teachers and university supervisors both "reported little systematic orientation to their functions in the student teaching experience except to note that they were there to somehow help the student teachers. The nature of that help was seldom described with any precision" (pp. 251-252). Finally, in advocating a "democratization" of the student teaching experience, Gore (1991) points to a struggle between the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor as to who has more power over the student who generally has no power whatsoever.

Despite the lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the members of the student teaching triad, it

is generally accepted that the cooperating teacher has greater influence on the student teacher--at least with respect to teaching behavior if not with respect to beliefs, attitudes, and philosophy (Metcalf, 1991)--than the university supervisor (Boydell, 1991; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Lanier & Little, 1986). At face value this is understandable, considering that "the cooperating teacher may well spend more time with the student teacher than the student teacher spent in all his/her professional education courses combine" (Watts, 1987, p. 155).

The literature on student teaching repeatedly stresses the importance of the cooperating teacher in the student teaching experience. For example, Glickman and Bey (1990) note that "The cooperating classroom teacher's role has been cited as influential, important, and essential to the teaching experience of student teachers" (p. 558). Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1987) suggest that "Cooperating teachers set the affective and intellectual tone and also share what student teachers learn by the way they conceive and carry out their role as teacher educators" (p. 256). Bowers (1994) describes the cooperating teacher as "the pivotal person in connecting university coursework with field experiences" (p. 103) and as the person seen by the student teacher as "embodying what it <u>means</u> to be a teacher" (p. 104, emphasis in original). The influence of cooperating teachers on student teachers is comparable to that of mentors on beginning teachers (Ganser & Koskela, 1995; Tannehill,

1989). As "the trusted person in the setting," a cooperating teacher (like a mentor) is "well positioned to induct novices into the invisible world of teaching" (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987, p. 272).

Because of unclear or conflicting guidelines provided by universities, cooperating teachers typically construct their own definition of roles and responsibilities, often based on their own experiences as a student teacher and teacher (Koerner, 1992). Such a self-definition is likely to reflect the "unique trajectory of the teacher's career and his or her personality" (Kagan et al., 1993). An ambiguous and personally constructed definition of the cooperating teacher role results in a variety of activities, ranging from serving as a role model, sounding board, and resource (Tannehill, 1989) to more ambitious activities, including guided participation (Colton & Sparks-Langer, 1992), systematic reflection on alternate strategies (Dunn & Taylor, 1993), and on-going inquiry into teaching practices (Wood, 1991).

The Impact of Serving as a Cooperating Teacher on the Veteran Teacher

Given student teaching's central place in teacher training and in teacher licensing requirements, it is ironic that there has been relatively little systematic investigation in recent years into the effectiveness of student teaching in preparing teachers. Another irony is that there has been little study

about the influence of serving as a university supervisor (Metcalf, 1991) or as a cooperating teacher on the person who is serving in that capacity (Tannehill, 1989).

Teachers serving as cooperating teachers readily admit to benefits for themselves in this experience, many of which mirror those reported by mentors of beginning teachers (Ganser, 1993). Working closely with student teachers can validate veteran teachers by giving them with "opportunities to think about their knowledge they had acquired through the years" (Koerner, 1992, p. 53). Cooperating teachers report that student teachers can heighten their awareness of innovative instructional and management techniques which they subsequently incorporate into their own practice (Bowers, 1994). In this sense, student teachers may provide experienced teachers with access to "ideas or people whose thinking is slightly ahead of one's own" (p. 320, Burden 1990). Student teachers can also boost their cooperating teachers' enthusiasm toward children and teaching (Tannehill, 1989).

Perhaps the most important benefits reported by cooperating teachers are those that emerge out of self-reflection on their work as teachers. For example, as a participant in an alternative teacher education program, Kennard (1993) suggests that close association with teacher education students allowed her "to understand the need to dismantle old ways of acting in my own teaching practice" (p. 164). Similarly, Black (1993) views

as an important outcome of her work with student teachers "a restorying of past practicum experiences, in my work as a student teacher, a cooperating teacher, and a practicum advisor" (p. 151).

However, reflection on one's practice resulting from serving as a cooperating teacher need not necessarily produce any change. For some cooperating teachers, working with student teachers reinforces their philosophy about teaching and their classroom practice. In analyzing the effect of teachers participating in the University of Alabama's Clinical Master Teachers Program, Kagan et al. (1993) emphasize that it is inaccurate to view school university partnerships and clinical faculty appointments for teachers as necessarily life-altering experiences that compel K-12 teachers to leave school teaching for work in a college or university. Such a view may simply reflect the unfounded bias of teacher educators that leaving the classroom for the university represents "upward mobility." Kagan et al. (1993) argue instead that such experiences "may simply provide new contexts in which experienced teachers can recoup, reflect, and clarify what they have always believed about students and classrooms; in the process, coming to realize the power inherent in the role of career teacher" (p. 441).

For many teachers, serving as a cooperating teacher is a powerful experience, both positive and negative, personal and professional. For example, at the end of the first term in

working with a student teacher, Kennard (1993) describes finding herself "poised in mid-air, one hand on the ejector button and the other reaching for a hold in an intangible dream" (p. 169). Yet, as Kagan et al. (1993) point out, relatively little is known about how serving as a cooperating teacher and other forms of collaboration can "complement and transform teachers' careers" (p. 499). Tannehill (1989) also argues that knowing the influence of student teaching on the cooperating teacher is essential "if we are to make effective use of cooperating teachers as key players in developing teaching skills of interns" (p. 252).

The limited knowledge of how serving as a cooperating teacher affects a teacher's career may be symptomatic of a poor understanding of teaching as a career in general. Although acknowledging that "Much of the seminal work on career development has sought, in effect, to identify 'sequences', 'phases,' and 'maxiphases' that can describe not only the career paths of individuals within the same profession, but also of individuals across different professions," Huberman (1992) also comments that "It would be fair--even charitable--to say that the empirical literature identifying 'phases' or 'stages' in teaching is tentative and uneven" (p. 123). Still, those who study teacher careers view work as a cooperating teacher as sometimes having career ramifications (Burden, 1986). In some cases, the connection between being a cooperating teacher and career is very

direct, as with the job-enlargement career ladder (Christensen & Fessler, 1992), school improvement leadership roles (Fessler & Ungaretti, 1994), and professional development schools (Zeichner, 1992).

In a detailed analysis of the career cycle of teachers, Burke and McDonnell (1992a, 1992b) view serving as a cooperating teacher as a profitable professional development experience during the early ("Competency Building") and middle ("Enthusiastic and Growing") stages of a teacher's career. Moreover, at career's end ("Career Wind-Down"), McDonnell and Burke (1992) suggest that acting as a mentor or a cooperating teacher is important to teachers as a "visible use of their expertise" (p. 215). In any case, the fact is that the over 100,000 bachelor's degrees in education awarded annually (U. S. Department of Education, 1994) involve an equally large number of veteran teachers serving as cooperating teachers. In itself, this situation warrants the careful analysis of the personal and professional impact of serving as a cooperating teacher on the experienced teacher.

The Study

Several generalizations can be summarized from the literature. First, the student teaching experience impacts significantly on prospective teachers. Second, the cooperating teacher is a key player in the student teaching semester and is positioned to have a great influence on beginning teacher

development.

However, the literature also reveals little systematic investigation about how cooperating teachers reflect on their work and how they perceive this work affects personal career and professional development. This study complements the literature on roles of cooperating teachers by exploring these questions as a basis for inquiry:

1. What might cooperating teachers learn about themselves when working with student teachers?
2. What is the impact of serving as a cooperating teacher on one's personal career path?
3. What is satisfying or problematic about the role of the cooperating teacher?
4. What contributions may the cooperating teacher make to their profession?

The objectives of this study were:

1) To present an analysis of elements teachers associate with the role of cooperating teacher;
2) To investigate themes in the data regarding perceptions cooperating teachers have related to their role as cooperating teacher and to personal career development; and
3) To explore themes regarding the role of cooperating teacher with the literature on roles of cooperating teachers.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology, particularly survey techniques, were used to collect data for this study. Subjects responded to a questionnaire (See Appendix) that included the following information: The first five questions requested demographic information including name, grade level taught (elementary, middle, secondary), type of position (regular education, special education, special assignment), gender, previous experience with student teachers, and the opportunity to take a supervision workshop or course. Items six through ten asked respondents to respond using the Likert scale from 1 to 7, with 7 having the highest value. These items included:

Item 6 - Students are adequately prepared to benefit from student teaching.

Item 7 - I am adequately prepared to be a cooperating teacher.

Item 8 - I am adequately supported by the University supervisor.

Item 9 - I find being a cooperating teacher a personally satisfying experience.

Item 10- I find being a cooperating teacher a positive professional experience.

The subjects were then asked to respond to three open-ended stems. The questionnaire contained four stems, but for the purpose of this study, responses to the following three stems were investigated:

1. A cooperating teacher is someone who . . .

2. As a cooperating teacher I look forward to . . .

3. As a cooperating I am unsure about . . .

Findings

Data were summarized by the three sections of the questionnaire - demographic information, the items using a Likert scale, and the three open-ended stems.

Demographics.

Of the 302 respondents, 224 were cooperating teachers affiliated with a medium-sized midwestern university, 41 were cooperating teachers selected randomly from three other teacher training institutions within the same state, and 37 were cooperating teachers participating in a field study experience in an urban setting. Two hundred twenty subjects were female and 82 were male. One hundred fifty-nine were elementary teachers, 59 were middle school teachers, seventy-six were high school teachers, and 7 represented other teaching areas. Two subjects did not respond to this question. Two hundred forty-one teachers identified themselves as regular education teachers; 48, as special education; and 13 did not identify teaching area. Two hundred ninety-nine of the 302 reported having had experience as cooperating teachers. Two hundred two of the teachers had taken a workshop or course for cooperating teachers; one hundred had not taken such a workshop or course.

Likert Scale items.

Participants responded to five questions by rating the

extent of their agreement on a seven point scale with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 7 indicating high agreement. Table 1 shows the items and summary statistics for responses on the Likert Scale.

Insert Table 1 about here

On average, the cooperating teachers rated responses to the scaled items in such a way as to indicate high agreement with the items. They saw themselves as adequately prepared to serve as cooperating teachers (item 7), they saw serving as a cooperating teacher as personally satisfying (item 9), and they reported that serving as a cooperating teacher was a positive professional development experience (item 10). They were a little less inclined to see teacher education students as prepared to benefit from their experience (item 6), and they were less inclined to report adequate support by university supervisors in their work as cooperating teachers (item 10).

Responses to Three Open-Ended Stems

Responses to the three open-ended stems were searched for themes and categories which explored teachers' beliefs, impressions, and actions about the role of the cooperating teacher in relationship to questions which directed this study. One researcher and faculty person at another college not directly involved in data-gathering for this study investigated responses

to the stems. Over 90 percent agreement on categories for responses occurred. Following summary of the categories and themes presented as percentages there is a discussion of these themes in relationship to the literature as demonstrated through quotations from cooperating teachers in this study. Cooperating teachers "speak for themselves."

Stem 1 A cooperating teacher is someone who . . . .

Two hundred seventy-five of the 302 participants completed stem 1. The two coders agreed on three major themes and categories for responses from cooperating teachers that dealt with the relationship between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher. Some cooperating teachers had responses that could be coded into only one category; others had several responses that were coded into more than one category. The categories of responses that dealt with the relationship between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher are as follows:

Category A - Models. A cooperating teacher models. Responses indicated a teacher demonstrating strategies and techniques for the student. The word model was included in the written response.

Category B - Guides. A cooperating teacher guides. Responses included words, concepts such as guides, directs, advises, shares ideas, shares expertise with the student teacher, provides constructive criticism and suggestions, informs, shares materials and

resources, shares knowledge. In most responses the word, guide, appeared in the text. Another related theme was the issue of time. Cooperating teachers shared that in order to successfully guide a student teacher, time is an important factor throughout the experience. Specific areas of guiding or directing mentioned included: planning, management, gaining proficiency in content and skills, organization, explaining, and constructing learning experiences and materials for the classroom. A related descriptor to guide mentioned in responses was coach.

Category C - Facilitator. A cooperating teacher facilitates growth.

Responses included words and concepts such as growth, encourages, motivates, communicates, nurtures, supports, and focuses on self-concept or confidence of the student teacher. The ideas and words in this list appeared as often as the word facilitator. Facilitator seemed to be the theme or category.

The following is a summary of responses to these three categories in terms of the number of individuals stating these themes and the associated percentages. Please note that percentages are based on the 275 participants who responded to the stem.

A. Models - Forty-six participants (17 percent) responded

with role model.

B. Guides - One hundred thirty-three participants (48 percent) responded with descriptors indicating guides or directs.

C. Facilitates - One hundred twenty participants (44 percent) responded with descriptors indicating growth, encouragement, support, nurturing.

Several subjects responded with descriptors containing more than one of the three categories identified by the researchers. These are summarized as follows:

Categories	Participants	Percent
A, B, C	16	5.8%
A, B	5	1.8%
A, C	8	2.9%
B, C	44	16.0%

Responses indicated substantial agreement among cooperating teachers that their role is mainly one of directing the experience and one of facilitating growth. These areas were mentioned more often than the behaviors associated with modeling techniques and strategies for students in their classroom. It could be that cooperating teachers view modeling as part of directing student teachers.

The three categories of responses considered so far -- A. Models, B. Guides, or C. Facilitates -- represent behaviors and concerns directly related to the relationship between the

cooperating teacher and student teacher. Seventy of the 275 participants who responded to the first stem provided responses that could not be coded into one of the three categories considered so far.

Two additional categories of response were identified which did not focus on the student teacher and cooperating teacher dyad. The first of the additional categories was designated as "Concern for the teaching profession." Responses in this category reflected concerns for the future of teaching, improving teaching, assuring that the right people got into teaching, and contributing to teaching as a professional obligation. Thirty-four of the respondents (12.4 percent) provided comments that could be categorized as "Concern for the teaching profession."

The second additional category related to the cooperating teachers seeing their role as transitional in the life of the student teacher. The transitions were from the university to the classroom and from theory to practice. Seventeen of the respondents (6.2 percent) described the cooperating teacher role as providing a transition in the life of the student teacher.

Nineteen respondents (6.9 percent) provided a variety of replies to the first stem which the researchers did not categorize further for this study.

Stem 2 As a cooperating teacher I look forward to . . . .

The responses of 150 of 302 participants were selected by taking participants with an even identification number. Nine

participants in the sample gave no response so the remaining sample consisted of 141 persons who responded to the second stem.

Two broad themes were identified from the responses as Giving-Receiving and Growth. Each of these two broad themes were divided into further subcategories to produce the following category system of responses to the stem:

Giving and Receiving

A. Gives ideas, information, expertise

B. Receives ideas, information, expertise

C. Gives help with the work of teaching

D. Receives help with the work of teaching

E. Gives energy, enthusiasm, motivation

F. Receives energy, enthusiasm, motivation

Growth

G. Watches the student teacher grow

H. Helps the student teacher grow

I. Grows oneself as a cooperating teacher

It was possible for a cooperating teacher to have responses in more than one category.

Insert Table 2 about here.

The responses to the second stem were coded as shown in Table 2. In each of the paired categories under giving and receiving, a greater number of cooperating teachers reported

looking forward to receiving than to giving. Sixty-three cooperating teachers (45 percent) looked forward to receiving ideas and information from the student teachers; forty-seven (33 percent) looked forward to giving ideas and information (categories A and B). Sixteen cooperating teachers (11 percent) looked forward to receiving help with the work of teaching (e.g., "extra hands"); the responses of half that number were coded to indicate that the cooperating teachers anticipated helping student teachers with the work of teaching. Thirty cooperating teachers (21 percent) looked forward to the energy and enthusiasm that would be brought to them and their classes by the student teachers. Nine cooperating teachers (6 percent) looked forward to imparting their enthusiasm for teaching and their love for students to the student teachers.

Under the theme of looking forward to growth, 30 cooperating teachers (21 percent) anticipated watching or seeing the growth in the student teacher that would occur over the student teaching experience. Twenty-one cooperating teachers (15 percent) intended to provide experiences to help the student teacher grow. Thirteen cooperating teachers (9 percent) looked forward to the growth they would experience themselves as a result of their work with the student teachers.

There were 16 comments representing 11 percent of the cooperating teachers that were not classified in this study.

Stem 3 As a cooperating teacher, I'm unsure about . . . .

Of the 302 study participants, 243 responded to this open-ended stem. The coders agreed that responses by the cooperating teachers revealed two major categories or themes related to their uncertainties: (1) uncertainty about their role and (2) uncertainty about the role of the university.

1. Uncertainty about their role. One hundred forty-five (60 percent) expressed uncertainty about their role as cooperating teacher. Specific statements included comments about personal expectations for their role including: how to evaluate student teachers, how to give feedback, how to guide the student teacher and to integrate them into the classroom, how to direct the student teacher, what interpersonal skills are best for working with student teachers, how to deal with differences in philosophy and teaching style, whether a "seasoned" teacher (over age 40) can model current teaching strategies, and how to be honest and deal with problematic situations. These responses relate to competency and clarity in enacting their role.

2. Uncertainty about the role of the university. Seventy respondents (29 percent) focused on the role of the university when discussing uncertainty. These issues included: preparation of student teachers, questions about courses and background of student teachers, uncertainty about university expectations for cooperating teachers, concerns about supervision and supervisors, and the teacher education program in general. Many of these

cooperating teachers expressed concern about communication between university and schools, particularly cooperating teachers. It is interesting that cooperating teachers did not offer solutions. They did not express specific strategies on ways that the university should empower cooperating teachers to have a greater decision-making role in the student teaching program. Cooperating teachers did recognize their power within the context of their classrooms.

Twenty-eight (12 percent) responded with comments that did not fit into the two categories of concern about their role and the university program. These 28 respondents mentioned feeling very comfortable and confident with their role, having concerns about commitment of student teachers, job prospects for student teachers, and the future of the teaching profession, including the public perception of teachers.

Fifty-nine participants or 19.5 percent of the 302 study participants either left the stem blank or put in a question mark. This result indicated personal uncertainty about answering the stem or as one participant said, "What are you seeking in this stem?" An appropriate follow-up to this study which may address this limitation would be focus group interviews to allow and encourage participants to expand answers and to ask clarifying question.

The area of uncertainty about the role of the cooperating teacher, the role of the university, and collaboration is an

important focus for further investigation.

Discussion

The following comments and discussion attempt to draw together concluding observations and remarks from the literature and data of this study.

The literature and data support that overall cooperating teachers embrace their role and look positively at the experience. The means for beliefs that they are adequately prepared to serve as cooperating teachers and that the experience is both personally and professionally satisfying were the highest on the Likert scales. Comments throughout the open-ended stems support this reaction. Cooperating teachers made comments such as:

> "I feel very confident about my abilities,"
>
> "I look forward to learning what is 'new' in education through discussion with a recently 'educated' teacher,"
>
> "A cooperating teacher is one who really enjoys teaching and wants to pass that love of kids and education on to the future teachers."

This study corroborates discussions in the literature in terms of cooperating teachers speaking about their role. They used the same categories discussed in the literature to talk about their role enactment in classrooms with student teachers. Many teachers used the concepts of role model, guide, and facilitator of growth to describe themselves. For example such comments appeared frequently in the responses in this study:

> "A role model would be a key description."

> "The cooperating teacher models positive teacher qualities, models effective work behavior."
>
> "shows the student teacher how to use their tools in a real life situation."
>
> "models appropriate teaching techniques, then stands back and allows the student teacher to take over."

Some respondents specified areas modeled.

> The cooperating teacher . . ."models the four basics of teaching -- 1) relationship with students, 2) vary the content and presentation of the lesson [lesson planning], 3) preparation of techniques, 4) classroom management."

These comments reflect a common view that cooperating teachers model techniques. Some respondents addressed a professional thrust to their comments:

> "A cooperating teacher is a professional, acts as a professional and serves as a role model for student teachers."
>
> "The cooperating teacher gives a student teacher a model to emulate and therefore must present a positive professional attitude and must make teaching for the student an attainable goal -- classrooms and teachers are not perfect and how a classroom teacher deals with students [children] and daily problems can motivate student teachers to become creative and effective teachers themselves."

Teachers spoke of themselves as guides. Being a guide was addressed in very specific terms such as: "Advises, directs, guides, shares teaching expertise, informs." Other comments focused on the responsibility of a cooperating teacher to be a professional guide. These comments illustrate the professional guiding aspect of a cooperating teacher's role:

> "A cooperating teacher gives guidance for successful learning experiences."
>
> "A cooperating teacher guides the student teacher through a

positive introduction to the teaching profession."

"A cooperating teacher cares enough about the future of education to be willing to guide a young teacher's learning."

"A cooperating teacher empowers a new teacher to develop a style and organizational system that will help them focus on teaching directly to the students' needs."

Being willing to be available and spend time with the new teacher were seen as part of providing guidance.

The role of facilitator most often meant encouraging, supporting and motivating for growth. Facilitating also meant allowing student teachers to experiment, to take risks and to build self-confidence in the context of a "safe environment." The following comments illustrate these beliefs:

"A cooperating teacher creates a positive learning environment for the student teacher. The student teacher needs this 'safe environment' for implementing theory, facing reality, and refining skills that are essential in teaching successfully."

"A cooperating teacher is flexible, is willing to allow the student teacher to take risks and try things even if they may not have worked in the past, is willing to allow the student teacher to take complete control, and is supportive and critical of the student teacher so as to help them learn from each situation."

Cooperating teacher comments revealed that they view themselves as providing a knowledge base and facilitating growth by assisting student teachers to experience a positive student teaching semester. The additional categories showed cooperating teachers' concern for the profession, the future of teaching and their responsibility to enhance the teaching profession through their personal work. They also viewed their role as transitional

in the life of the student teacher to move from the college environment to the school environment. One cooperating teacher expressed this thought:

> "A cooperating teacher assists students in bridging the gap between college training and practical implementation [theory to practice]."

The literature discusses cooperating teachers as mentors. In this study, 10 participants specifically used the word "mentor" to describe their role.

The concept of collegiality is very important to cooperating teachers. Giving and receiving ideas and materials is a significant aspect of working with a student teacher. They view personal gains and change in terms of receiving new ideas and strategies from their student teachers. This growth for cooperating teachers is important. Cooperating teachers are looking for ways to be "revitalized" in their profession; however, growth is focused more on the classroom. Growth in terms of moving along a career path or in terms of staff development were not addressed. This may be a result of the phrasing of the open-ended stems. Overwhelmingly, in terms of responses to stem 2 (As a cooperating teacher I look forward to . . .) and stem 3 (As a cooperating teacher I am unsure about . . .) cooperating teachers are more focused on personal expectations and enactment of their role in the context of their own classroom. Reflection in terms of examining beliefs was not a major theme. These thoughts were shared:

"I look forward to sharing and exchanging ideas."

"As a cooperating teacher, I look forward to learning new ideas from the interns and being able to pass on some of my knowledge in order to help them with their future career."

"I look forward to learning as much from my student teacher as she/he will hopefully learn from me."

"I look forward to gaining new ideas from younger and enthusiastic teachers."

"I look forward to the comradeship of working with another adult. I'm appreciative of new thoughts and ideas, a fresh view point."

This cooperating teacher used the word renews:

"I feel the experience also makes me a better teacher and renews my interest and enthusiasm for the teaching profession."

Another theme was present. Cooperating teachers shared that they looked forward to receiving help in the classroom.

"I look forward to a whole resource of new ideas, an extra pair of hands, and someone to share classroom experience with a co-worker."

Two comments did appear to address a more reflective attitude:

"I look forward to reexamining the reasons why I'm doing what I'm doing."

"Having a student teacher keeps me fresh and new in my methods of teaching. The student teacher becomes a critic--in a positive way, thus my techniques are improved."

Cooperating teachers recognize their expertise. The data in this study support this view as presented in the literature. Cooperating teachers believe that they can make a significant contribution to the teaching profession (referred to as "my profession") and to teacher training institutions. Many of these

comments were made as additional comments. Overall, specific recommendations were not offered. Teachers said:

> "A cooperating teacher cares about the future of education in the public schools."
>
> "I look forward to seeing the student teacher become a confident educator able to make decisions which lead to effective teaching practices."

Participants in this study recognize that the student teaching experience typically depends on relationships in the student teaching triad. Presentation of data from the open-ended stems underscores the recognition by cooperating teachers that the relationship and collegiality they establish with their student teacher greatly determines the success of the experience for the student teacher and personal satisfaction for themselves. Cooperating teachers view their role as pivotal between the university and the field experience. Their role is viewed largely as being affective in emphasis (growth, guidance), but they also talk about their role in terms of techniques.

However, cooperating teachers perceive ambiguity and lack of clarity in university stated purposes and expectations. Some cooperating teachers discussed procedures for selection of cooperating teachers and supervisors as well as the lack of training for these individuals. Concern about preparation of student teachers, particularly with regard to content and discipline, were mentioned. Some of the participants raised issues of power - evaluation procedures and dealing with problematic issues such as how to counsel a student who is not

performing satisfactorily. Communication with the university program offices and supervisors should be improved. Some confusion about the role of university supervisors was addressed. Cooperating teachers did not make recommendations or suggestions. One participant stated a plan to forward a letter to the university. It is inferred that some of the participants may wish to be involved in bridging communication between the schools and university. Nothing specific was stated. In responses to the third stem, (As a cooperating teacher, I'm unsure about . . .), one-third of those who responded addressed school and university program issues, supervision, communication, and expectations. Teachers shared these views:

> "As a cooperating teacher I am frustrated by the demands placed on field practicum students by university faculty which deter them from making a commitment to their school placements regarding lesson plans, teaching lesson, correcting student papers."
>
> "I am frustrated by attitudes created by a Pass/Fail system. Do students always 'pass'? At what point are poor candidates weeded out?"

Summary

Cooperating teachers recognize their importance and influence over student teachers. Some experience uncertainty or conflict. Others express confidence. Cooperating teachers believe their role is important and they view their role as contributing to the profession. They also view themselves as learners and many look forward to personal growth in terms of sharing, gaining new perspectives, ideas, and "catching

enthusiasm" from student teachers. There is agreement that being a cooperating teacher is an important aspect of service to the profession.

Responses in this study indicate a possible desire and a need to more directly involve cooperating teachers in teacher education programs. Cooperating teachers look for positive communication with the university. Further inquiry based upon this study may include focus group interviews to explore issues raised in the open-ended stems and communication between schools and the university. Such interviews could afford opportunities for discussion, collaboration, and reflection regarding beliefs, practices and the future of teacher training programs.

This study assumed that all four groups of cooperating teachers represented a single population. Further analysis of the data will be needed to determine if cooperating teachers from the different programs presented different profiles of responses.

Problems and Prospects

Improving the contribution that serving as a cooperating teacher can have on experienced teachers' work and careers is related to improving student teaching itself as part of teacher preparation. This is a formidable challenge that necessitates reconceptualizing not only the roles and responsibilities of the student teaching triad, but also the roles and responsibilities of K-12 schools and institutions of higher education as partners in teacher preparation.

Decades of "institutional narratives" (Clandinin, 1993) have engendered boundaries between schools and universities. For example, there persists a mindset that colleges and universities are only interested in knowledge and theory, whereas schools only value application of knowledge and theory in practice (Zeichner, 1992). Moreover, there endures the belief that the obligation of schools to teach children precludes using any resources for preparing teachers. Accordingly, schools generally provide cooperating teachers with no reduction in teaching responsibilities, thereby limiting the time available for meeting with a student teacher to time taken away from preparation for or reflection on one's own teaching (Gore, 1991, Wood, 1991). At the same time, teacher education institutions hesitate to use any large portion of their resources to facilitate school teachers' work as cooperating teachers, perhaps reflecting college and university faculty's ambivalence about the adequacy of school teachers to be closely involved in teacher preparation in the first place (Cornbleth & Ellsworth, 1994).

There is ample evidence, nevertheless, that student teaching can be modified. For example, much of the professional development school movement depends on reconceptualizing student teaching and the student teaching triad (Stalling & Kowalski, 1990; Zeichner, 1992). Moreover, the professionalization of teaching also requires the direct involvement of school teachers in teacher education policies and practices (Lieberman, 1988).

The new roles for classroom teachers that accompany these changes may have the potential to take them beyond passive "cooperation" with university personnel (Cornbleth & Ellsworth, 1994; Holland, Clift, Veal, Johnson, & McCarthy, 1992). These new roles may also have a broader and deeper influence on their professional development and careers than that associated with traditional service as a cooperating teacher. While recognizing that the professional lives and careers of teachers are also affected by the context in which they carry out their work (Huberman, 1992; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992) and by personal factors (Burden, 1986), enhancing and enlarging the role of cooperating teacher will contribute to the personal and professional satisfaction of many veteran teachers and serve to make their own careers more productive and more fulfilling.

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Appendix

Survey of Cooperating Teachers (Spring, 1994) Survey No. _____

Please check your teaching assignment (grade level and type).

1. ___ Elementary ___ Middle school ___ High school Other: _____

2. ___ Regular education ___ Special education

___ Specialist in _____ Other: _____

3. Check your gender: ___ Female ___ Male

Please estimate for how many students you have served as a cooperating teacher in each of the following categories.

4. ___ first field experience (e.g., "Observation and Participation")
___ middle field experience (e.g., "Field Studies")
___ Student teaching or internship
___ Graduate practicum or inservice

Indicate which of the following college or university courses you have taken and at what institution(s).

5. ___ Supervision of student teachers at _____

___ Advanced course in supervision of student teachers at _____

Please indicate how strongly you agree with each of the following statements by circling the appropriate number.

		AGREE						DISAGREE
6.	Teacher education students are adequately prepared to benefit from their field studies or student teaching experiences.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
7.	I am adequately prepared to serve as a cooperating teacher.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
8.	I am adequately supported by university supervisors in my work as a cooperating teacher.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
9.	Serving as a cooperating teacher is a personally satisfying experience for me.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
10.	Serving as a cooperating teacher is a positive professional development experience for me.	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Based on your experiences as a cooperating teacher, please complete each of the following three stems:

A COOPERATING TEACHER IS SOMEONE WHO . . .

AS A COOPERATING TEACHER, I LOOK FORWARD TO . . .

AS A COOPERATING TEACHER, I'M UNSURE ABOUT . . .

Think carefully about your experiences as a cooperating teacher. To what would you compare those experiences? What analogies, metaphors, or similes come to mind? With this in mind, finish the following stem as completely as possible.

IN MY EXPERIENCES, SERVING AS A COOPERATING TEACHER IS LIKE . . .

Please return this survey by DATE in the enclosed postage-paid envelope, or send it directly to:

Tom Ganser, Director
Office of Field Experiences
UW-Whitewater
Whitewater, WI 53190-1790

Table 1

Summary Statistics for Items with Likert Scales

6. Teacher education students are adequately prepared to benefit from their O&P, field studies or student teaching experiences.

N	Mean	Std. Dev	Minimum	Maximum
299	5.59	1.19	1	7

7. I am adequately prepared to serve as a cooperating teacher.

N	Mean	Std. Dev	Minimum	Maximum
300	6.20	0.98	1	7

8. I am adequately supported by university supervisors in my work as a cooperating teacher.

N	Mean	Std. Dev	Minimum	Maximum
298	5.62	1.49	1	7

9. Serving as a cooperating teacher is a personally satisfying experience for me.

N	Mean	Std. Dev	Minimum	Maximum
301	6.36	1.00	1	7

10. Serving as a cooperating teacher is a positive professional development experience for me.

N	Mean	Std. Dev	Minimum	Maximum
301	6.38	0.92	1	7

Table 2

Responses to Stem 2

"I look forward to . . ."

Giving and Receiving		Frequency	%
A.	Gives ideas, information, expertise	47	33%
B.	Receives ideas, information, expertise	63	45%
C.	Gives help with the work of teaching	8	6%
D.	Receives help with the work of teaching	16	11%
E.	Gives energy, enthusiasm, motivation	9	6%
F.	Receives energy, enthusiasm, motivation	30	21%
Growth			
G.	Watches the student teacher grow	30	21%
H.	Helps the student teacher grow	21	15%
I.	Grows oneself as a cooperating teacher	13	9%
	Other Comments	16	11%